



Kimberly A. Foster
Executive Director

LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW, CHAIR
DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS
TRULA J. WORTHY-CLAYTON

APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **March 2, 2009**, in Room 140 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Carol O. Biondi	Sandra Rudnick
Patricia Curry	Stacey Savelle
Ann Franzen	Martha Trevino Powell
Helen Kleinberg	Adelina Sorkin
Dr. La-Doris McClaney	Dr. Harriette F. Williams
Tina Pedersen	Trula J. Worthy-Clayton

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Susan Friedman	Steven M. Olivas, Esq.
Rev. Cecil Murray	

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by Commissioner Sorkin, Chair.

II. INTRODUCTIONS

Self introductions were made.

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Action

The Agenda for March 2, 2009 was unanimously approved after a proper motion.

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – FEBRUARY 2, 2009

Action

The Minutes of February 2, 2009, were unanimously approved after a proper motion.

V. CHAIR'S REPORT

Chair Sorkin reported on the 18th Annual Interfaith/Intercultural Breakfast at the Long Beach Convention Center on February 24, 2009. Marian Wright Edelman, the keynote speaker and President and Founder of The Children's Defense Fund, spoke of the importance of education and providing opportunities for our children.

Commissioner Biondi shared with the Commission that Marian Wright Edelman was also in Sacramento to address the Legislature and gave testimony on children's issues. In addition, Commissioner Biondi informed the Commission that Commissioner McClaney was recognized by the State Legislature for her community service.

VI. COMMITTEE/LIAISON REPORTS

- **25th Anniversary Ad Hoc Committee**

Commissioner Trevino Powell reported on the progress of the 25th Anniversary celebration planning for April 30, 2009.

- **MHSA Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI)**

Commissioner Kleinberg indicated to the Commission that proposed allocations for MHSA PEI funding for SPA 6 does not appear to address this SPAs unmet needs. In addition, Commissioner Kleinberg stated that in response to concerns expressed from various stakeholders about the reduction, DMH is convening a meeting of stakeholders on March 9, 2009 to discuss the MHSA PEI allocation. It was suggested that the Commission not take any action until there is a report back regarding the outcome of the meeting. It was recommended that the Department have a representative at this meeting.

VII. DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Director, Trish Ploehn informed the Commission of the projected budget cuts in the County. She further informed the Commission that overall DCFS is doing well based upon savings they have experienced under the Title IV-E Waiver and through the implementation of the various new programs/services. Additionally, Director Ploehn informed the Commission that the CEO has directed her to develop a revised budget based on a 10% and 15% reduction.

The Commissioners expressed strongly their concerns over cutting services to children and emphasized that these services need to be maintained. In addition, members of the Commission expressed concern regarding DCFS being "punished" for successfully doing their job and saving money. Commissioner Williams suggested DCFS be a stronger advocate for funding services for children. Commissioner Worthy-Clayton stated that in

addition to DCFS, several other departments work together in providing services to children, such as the Sheriff's Department, Probation Department, DPSS, and DHS. These services to children may also be affected by those departmental budget cuts, as all County departments have been asked to develop revised budgets based on the current economic status of the County.

TITLE IV-E WAIVER

- **DCFS**

Deputy Director, Lisa Parrish of DCFS, began with a brief addition to the discussion using a PowerPoint regarding the economy. Ms. Parrish discussed an update on the trend analysis of unemployment and child welfare caseloads, specifically the out-of-home care population. The data indicates there is no consistent correlation between the direction of unemployment rates and child welfare caseloads. Ms. Parrish indicated that the determining factor for families in crisis is not what put them in crisis but the interventions of the system that drives the rate of children in out-of-home care. Ms. Parrish reported that the out-of-home care population has declined over the past 20 months. The main driving force of this decline in placements was reported to be an increase in the number of reunifications as well as faster reunifications.

Follow-Up

Commissioner Curry requested data on the emancipation of children 14 years old and up, for the past 5 years, how many have come into the system each year and how many have exited each year. Trish Ploehn was not sure if the data was available by age, but agreed to check.

Commissioner Curry also requested updated information on the trend analysis for the last quarter 2008 and the first quarter 2009.

Deputy Director Parrish reported that during the first year of the Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project, DCFS has expanded three initiatives that improve safety and strengthen healthy connections between children, families and communities: Team Decision Making (TDM); Family Finding and Engagement; and Upfront Assessments for Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Domestic Violence. At the end of the first year, DCFS successfully generated \$28.9 million in reinvestment funds. In the midst of the economic crisis, the terms of the Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project have made it extremely difficult for the State or federal government to decrease the capped allocation revenue the County will receive from them through June 2012, and each year a growth factor of 2% has been locked in for most of this revenue. The terms of the agreements require that any reinvestment funds be spent on child welfare services, thus the County is able to provide more crucial resources at a very critical time.

For the second sequence of reinvestment, DCFS has planned the following initiatives: Upfront Assessments for High-Risk Families on Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Domestic Violence; Countywide Prevention Efforts, such as Differential Response; Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF); Regional Office Community Partnering;

Expansion of Team Decision Making (TDM); Expansion of Family Finding and Engagement.

Deputy Director Parrish indicated that most of the funds (\$22 million) for the second sequence will be used to roll-out Upfront Assessments for High-Risk Families on Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Domestic Violence to all of the regional offices. There are currently four offices (Compton, Command Post, Vermont Corridor, Lakewood) conducting Upfront Assessments using Family Preservation agencies (Shields is the model). These agencies are attending TDMs and conducting the Upfront Assessments using the Behavioral Services Assessment Tool (BSAT).

Commissioner Kleinberg stated that the big concern is that once assessment is completed, who is going to provide the treatment necessary for these families in the three major areas of Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Domestic Violence.

Deputy Director Parrish discussed the second largest portion of funds (\$6 million) being used for the Countywide Prevention Efforts, such as Differential Response. DCFS is investing in more community-based services and pending the evaluation of the Prevention Initiative Demonstration Project (PIDP), some money may go into funding the second year of the PIDP. They are also looking into Differential Response, to set-up a pathway for families whose phone call referrals are evaluated out but they still need services. Deputy Director Parrish indicated they will present an evaluation on the use of these funds to the Board of Supervisors in May 2009.

Commissioner Kleinberg inquired about families with constant referrals and investigations, but no case is opened; and, while expanding prevention, if these families can be helped.

- **Probation**

Deputy Director Jitahadi Imara of Probation announced to the Commission that today will be his last presentation to the Commission in his current capacity. He stated that he has been appointed as the new Deputy Director for the Camps and Juvenile Hall. Deputy Director Reaver Bingham will now have responsibility for Placement and Aftercare. He expressed his appreciation to the Commission, Trish Ploehn, and Casey Family for their collaboration in working together.

Deputy Director Imara reported on the two Probation Department Title IV-E Waiver initiatives: Cross-Systems Case Assessment and Case Planning; and Enhanced Family Functioning; Functional Family Therapy (FFT). He reported that the Cross-Systems Case Assessment and Case Planning pairs mental health clinicians and therapists with Placement Deputy Probation Officers (DPO) to provide an integrated and coordinated assessment of delinquency risk and protective factors and mental health functioning of youth who have been ordered Suitable Placement by the Court. The assessment is used for case planning purposes and for matching the probationer with the appropriate group home provider. It is anticipated that this process will increase the likelihood of identifying best possible placements to respond to the varied needs of youth, thereby

improving the chances of achieving youth safety, youth and family well-being and family reunification.

The first year preliminary analyses indicate that: 1) There is a need to assess more “new” cases - research suggests these youth are the highest risk for placement failure; 2) There needs to be a push to have greater family engagement and involvement during the first 30 to 60 days of placement - this is when there is a higher rate of recidivism; 3) There is a need to provide a more in-depth assessment and follow-up treatment services for repeat offenders - these youth tend to have a complex set of problems and risk factors; 4) There is a need for Mental Health clinicians working collaboratively with Placement DPOs to ensure the youth’s assessment addresses both mental health and behavioral needs; 5) There is a need for Mental health screening and assessment of youth to move from being an option to a necessity - the data shows that many of the youth suffer from serious mental health disorders.

Enhanced Family Functioning-Functional Family Therapy (FFT) has been adopted by Probation as one of the priority treatment approaches to serve youth returning home from congregate care. Youth are identified and pre-approved for enrollment in FFT services before Probation has requested a Change of Order from the Court. These services are recommended to the Court during the youth’s group home placement episode. FFT services begin once the Court grants a Change of Order from Suitable Placement to Home on probation. Probation utilizes two community-based organizations, Shields for Families and StarView Community Services to provide FFT services to youth under the supervision of Probation and their families.

Summary findings for the first year of implementation indicated positive outcomes for youth participating in some FFT programming, with the best outcomes for youth who successfully complete the full FFT treatment requirements. It also showed that fewer FFT youth were sent to out-of-home settings following termination from their original Suitable Placement Order, and when these youth were sent to Camps, the length of stay in Camps was shorter. Also, FFT had a positive impact on re-arrest and sustained criminal petition rate for gang affiliated youth. The clinical profile of both the FFT youth and their parents also improved dramatically. During the first year of implementation, lessons were learned for the second year. Among these lessons are increased and improved family involvement and more prudent use of intervention resources. FFT was proven to be an effective intervention for placement youth and their families and will be carried on to the next year.

IX. PRESENTATION

- **DCFS Family Reunification Re-Entry Study**

Division Chief Mitch Mason reported on the Foster Care Re-Entry Study conducted by DCFS at the request of Commissioner Kleinberg. In Fiscal Year 2006-2007, 6870 children were reunified with their parents. Within twelve months, 717 re-entered the Foster Care System. Re-entry occurred for 65% of the children within the first six months of reunification.

Mr. Mason informed the Commission that a sample size of 30 children from 30 families was used for the case review and interviews with CSWs, SCSWs, parents and youth. The Study shows that the triggers for Re-Entry into Foster Care were: Neglect-31% ; Substance Abuse-30%; Mental Health-10%; Domestic Violence-10%; Physical Abuse-8%; Child's Behavior-8%; Emotional Abuse-3%. The Study's Key Findings were: 75% Re-entered for the original allegation; 25% Re-entered for the original allegation plus a new Mental Health or Domestic Violence allegation. Also, in 8 of the 30 cases, the Court reunified or released the children to a parent against the recommendation of DCFS. The median length of stay for re-entry is 230 days in comparison to 487 days for successful reunifications. The Study recommendations are in these areas: Assessments, Planning of Services, Transition, and Post-Reunification Support.

Commissioner Worthy-Clayton inquired of Mr. Mason what basic case work principles might be incorporated into practice as a result of the finding of the study. Mr. Mason indicated that would be a next step. Commission suggested that DCFS might identify 2-3 basic casework principles to employ to address issues specific to these youth. Additionally, Commissioner Worthy-Clayton suggested having more time to evaluate parents with long standing substance abuse issues in order to make sure that it is the appropriate time for the child to reunify with them. Ms. Parrish indicated they are working on an aftercare protocol in this area.

Commissioner Curry thanked Mitch Mason and DCFS for conducting the study and Commissioner Kleinberg for initiating the request for a study. Commissioner Curry requested data on re-entry after 12 months. Mr. Mason indicated they would get back to the Commission with the data for re-entry after up to 24 months. Commissioner Curry also requested a break down of youth over 14 yrs. old, what percentage were reunified and what percentage re-entered (this data was found included on page 16 of the Study Report). Commissioner Curry also emphasized the need to do the same Re-entry study on Adoptions.

Commissioner Savelle requested clarification on how the children were selected for the case study and voiced concerns regarding conducting interviews with children via telephone. Mr. Mason responded that the children were selected with a random sample generator ensuring equal representation across SPAs. Mr. Mason stated the reason for telephone interviews was due to a lack of resources and time constraints to conduct the study. Mr. Mason agreed that given more time and resources, in person interviews would have been better. Another reason for telephone interviews and the fact that they were only able to conduct 7 was because the sample was spread out across the County. Commissioner Savelle stated that the Study indicates that the Court placed youth against the worker's recommendation due to a lack of documentation in the Court Report. Commissioner Savelle also inquired about minimized case transfers. Mr. Mason responded that there are several factors to case transfers including disbursing caseloads when a worker leaves, the families living in a different area than the office, and they have also discovered programmatic issues. Commissioner Savelle inquired if there was any instance of a child re-entering the system, going back home, and re-entering the system again within the 12 month period. Mr. Mason did not recollect any

instance like this, but agreed to look into it. Due to time constraints, Commissioner Savelle will e-mail further inquiries directly to Mr. Mason for his response.

Commissioner Sorkin inquired if there were any prior over-night visits, then week-end visits, building up to placement. Mr. Mason stated that visitation has not been documented and was not looked at in this study, as this study focused on re-entry. Commissioner Sorkin questioned the level of services provided by Family Preservation agencies in the areas of Domestic Violence, Substance Abuse and Mental Health. She noted that more than 70% of these families received Family Preservation services. Mr. Mason responded that there are issues whether the families are getting the matching services for their needs. DCFS is questioning what services, at what level and with what professional expertise are the Family Preservation agencies providing these services. Mr. Mason indicated that Shields is one that is doing an outstanding job. Commissioner Sorkin also stated that the Study indicates there is a lack of services for Spanish speaking clients and questioned how they could locate more providers in the community. Mr. Mason agreed that the lack of Spanish speaking services is an area of concern. Commissioner Sorkin questioned whether DCFS is going after PEI funds. Trish Ploehn indicated that they will go after all available funds, including PEI funds.

Follow-Up

Commissioner Curry requested further data on re-entry after 12 months; Mr. Mason indicated they would get back to the Commission with the data for re-entry after up to 24 months.

Mr. Mason to follow-up regarding Commissioner Savelle's inquiry regarding a child/children re-entering the system, going back home, and re-entered the system again within the 12 month period.

X. PUBLIC COMMENTS

None

XI. ANNOUNCEMENTS

None

XII. ADJOURN

Commissioner Sorkin adjourned the meeting.